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**TOURISM POLICY IN THE CANARY ISLANDS – PAST  
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# TOURISM POLICY IN THE CANARY ISLANDS – PAST EXPERIENCES, CURRENT TRENDS AND FUTURE PLANS

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**Abstract:** The Canary Islands are a well-known brand in Europe, and in 2017 the number of tourist arrivals exceeded 14 million. The heavy tourist inflow in the 1990s prompted the Government of the Canary Islands to adopt a policy to protect the environment by restricting the building of new hotels. This moratorium was abolished in 2018. The paper describes the evolution of Canary Islands tourism policy in recent years and explains how the government, in cooperation with the private sector, is planning transform the Canary archipelago into a destination with distinct features, different from its competitors.

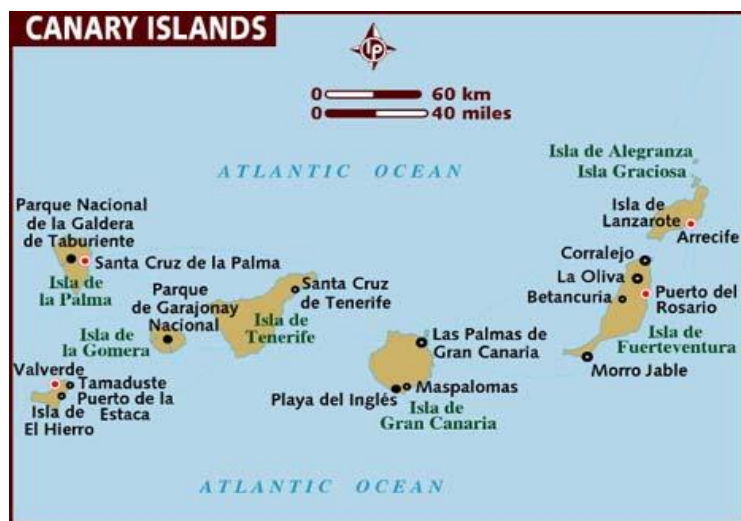
Key words: Canary Islands, Spain, Tourism policy, TALC model.

JEL Codes: D8, E3, R5, Z1, Z3.

## 1. THE CANARY ISLANDS

### *Composition and location of the archipelago*

The Canary Islands archipelago consists of seven islands (El Hierro, La Gomera, La Palma, Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura and Lanzarote) situated in the Atlantic Ocean to the west of Morocco. With a population of just over 2 million.



Source: <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/africa/canary-islands/> visited 11/12/2018

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The Canary Islands are a Spanish autonomous community with self-government in different areas, including education, justice, health, public services, transport, roads, environment, energy, and water supply, among others. The Islands are designated as an ultraperiferic region of the European Union. They are renowned as tourist destinations, with the number of tourist arrivals exceeding 14 million in 2017 (Báez-García, Flores-Muñoz & Gutiérrez-Barroso, 2018, p. 360).

### *Brief political history*

Four years after the arrival of Christopher Columbus in America, the Canary Islands became a part of Spain, remain a colony until 1812 when the first Spanish constitution was passed through parliament. The constitution, known as the Constitution of Cadiz because it was approved in this city, granted the Canary Islands new administrative arrangements as a full Spanish province, similar to Cuba, Puerto Rico or the Philippines. With this new Spanish administrative status, the economic and political elite in Tenerife and Gran Canaria (the two most populated islands) disputed as to which of the two islands should be the capital of the archipelago (Guimerá Peraza, 1976). The economic and political elites in both islands were of the view that the capital of the province should be established in their respective island (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria). The debate between these elites from Tenerife and Gran Canaria, as to which of the two islands should be the capital of the archipelago was not resolved, and in 1912 island councils for each Canary island were created. In spite of the importance of the island councils as the main island public administrative authority, the province of the Canary Islands was divided into two new provinces in 1927, with Santa Cruz de Tenerife (islands of Tenerife, La Palma, La Gomera and El Hierro) and Las Palmas (islands of Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura and Lanzarote).

The new provinces were consolidated in the autonomous community after the statute of autonomy was approved by the Spanish parliament in 1982. The first elections to the Parliament of the Canary Islands were held in 1983.

### *The economy of the Canary Islands*

The economy of the Canary Islands during the last four centuries was highly dependent on foreign markets mainly based on the export of goods and services including sugar cane in the 16th century, wine in the 17th century, cochineal in the 18th century, bananas in the 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and tourism since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (González Lemus, 2001; Macías Hernández & Rodríguez Martín, 1995; Macías Hernández, 2011; Macías Hernández & Pérez Hernández, 2011).

The main problem of high dependence on exports was that when the price of these goods in the international markets declined, unemployment increased and many workers emigrated to other countries in search of job opportunities, mainly in Latin America in countries including Cuba, Venezuela or Brazil. One clear example is that during the 1940s and the 1950s emigration was particularly high and Venezuela, for example, became known as the eighth Canary Island, due the large Canary Island community living there.

## 2. SOME TOURISM STATISTICS

Most incoming tourist hail from the United Kingdom, with German tourist in second place. Together these accounted for more than 50% of tourist arrivals in 2017, as shown in Table 1

Table 1: Tourist arrivals (%)

<b>Where they come from?</b>	<b>%</b>
United Kingdom	32.7
Germany	20.3
Mainland Spain	10.7
Holland	4.1
Sweden	3.8
France	3.5
Italy	3.5
Ireland	3.2
Norway	2.9
Others	15.4

Source: Promotur, tourist profile 2017.

Table 2: Arrivals in each island (%)

<b>What island do they travel?</b>	<b>%</b>
Lanzarote	18.1
Fuerteventura	14.1
Gran Canaria	28.4
Tenerife	37.4
La Palma	2.0

Source: Promotur, tourist profile 2017. No data for La Gomera and El Hierro because their airports only receive inter island flights.

Table 3 shows that a large proportion of incoming tourists utilised the services of tour operators to book their flights.

Table 3: Flights (%)

<b>Book flight</b>	<b>%</b>
To a tour operator	44.8
To an airplane company	25.8
To a travel agency	18
To a travel website	11.4

Source: Promotur, tourist profile 2017.

Table 4, which relates to tourist accommodation, shows that almost 40% did not stay in hotels. The majority of those that stayed in hotels opted for a 4-star hotel.

Table 4: Tourist Accommodation (%)

<b>Where they stay?</b>	<b>%</b>
Hotel 5*	6.8
Hotel 4*	38.4
Hotel 1-2-3*	14.4
Non-hotel accommodation	32.4
Own house	4.8
Other	3.2

Source: Promotur, tourist profile 2017.

### 3. THE TALC MODEL APPLIED TO THE CANARY ISLANDS TOURISM

In 1980 the tourism researcher Richard Butler developed a model called Tourism Area Life Cycle Model (TALC) (Butler, 1980) to analyze tourism destinations such as the Canary Islands (Báez-García, Flores-Muñoz & Gutiérrez-Barroso, 2018). The TALC model was rewritten years later (Butler, 2004; Butler, 2006) enlarging the research taking into account the numerous contributions elaborated by a wide number of academic researchers (Diedrich & García-Buades, 2009; Flores-Muñoz, Gutiérrez-Barroso & Báez García, 2019; Lagiewski, 2006; Pratt, 2011).

The model consists of five stages, labelled (1) exploration (2) involvement (3) development (4) consolidation, and (5) stagnation (Butler, 1980).

In the case of the Canary Islands, the first stage – the exploration stage – occurred at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when tourism in the Canary Islands emerged as the city of Puerto de la Cruz (island of Tenerife) saw the first arrivals of tourists. Initially the Canary Island offered mostly health tourism due the warm weather during all the year, with many British tourists arriving in Puerto de la Cruz to improve their health (González Lemus, 2012; González Lemus, 2015).

The second and “involvement” stage may be said to have occurred at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, local residents started to open some facilities related to tourism such as hotels and restaurants. This growth stopped sharply due to the Spanish civil war (1936-1939) and the Second World War (1939-1945) resulting in a marked reduction of tourist arrivals. A highlight event, during the early 1920s, was the visit of the famous anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski who wrote a piece of his world renowned book “Argonauts of the Western Pacific” in the north of Tenerife.

During the third and “development” stage, which occurred in the 1970s, tourism in the Canaries began to grow as the islands became widely known as tourist destinations. The tour operators started to invest and the international hotel brands, and built new hotels replacing the local owners as the main source of tourist employment (Flores-Muñoz, Gutiérrez-Barroso & Báez García, 2019, p. 61).

In the fourth and “consolidation” stage, which started at the beginning of the 1980s and ended during the 90s, tourist arrivals continued to grow but not as rapid as in the previous stage. However, in the main tourist municipalities, the number of tourist beds exceeded the number of local residents. This large tourist inflow had major negative social and environmental impacts on the local residents (Diedrich & García-Buades, 2009).

The fifth and “stagnation” stage can be considered to have occurred in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Academic researchers started to identify the Canaries as a mature destination and the politicians took into account the evolution of the destination to develop new decisions with the aim of avoiding the decline of tourist arrivals and improving the tourism product. The Canary Islands offer a very similar tourist product as in other sun destinations and the reduction of tourist arrivals had led to public concern. In 2001, the Government of the Canary Islands passed a new law through parliament to avoid the decline in tourism (Law 6/2001, of July 23), involving urgent measures in terms of spatial planning in the Canary Islands. The main impact of the law was setting a moratorium on the construction of new hotels with some exceptions for 4 stars and 5 stars hotels in order to avoid excess supply of tourist accommodation. This moratorium was kept in place until 2018 when a new law was passed through parliament the reverse the moratorium, after pressure from the main public and private tourism organizations (Báez-García, Flores-Muñoz & Gutiérrez-Barroso, 2018).

The main political actors as well as the private sector in the archipelago agree that it is necessary to involve private enterprise in the drawing up and implementation of the tourism policy, in order to ensure its success. Both parties want to improve the image of the destination by creating new

tourism products in addition to the attractions associated with the sea and the climate, including the Islands' culture, the gastronomy and the physical environment so as to render the Canary Islands a destination differentiated from its competitors (Government of the Canary Islands, 2012). It should be said, however, that the Canary Islands are highly dependent on tour operators and it is not always possible to ensure quality over quantity in tourist arrivals.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The Canary Islands is mainly known as a sun and good climate destination. During the last twenty years very important decisions were taken by the Government of the Canary Islands with regard to tourism. Perhaps the most important and controversial decision was the moratorium which changed the evolution of tourism.

Basing on the Butler TALC model, this paper described the evolution of the tourism in the Canary Islands focusing in the different stages so as to illustrate the changes in tourism inflows.

For the coming years, it is planned that tourism in the Canary Islands would develop on the basis of partnership between the public sector and the private sector, with the aim of creating a destination with distinct features, different from its competitors.

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